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ABSTRACT

Commonly those who entered the field of employment counseling indicated interest in "helping people" and human psychology. Once counselors began working in the field, most of their specialized learning about the field occurred on the job. During this training period the staff employment counselor carried a regular case load but would become more client-effective after more time with the agency. The demand for better trained entrant practitioners has led to a further impetus behind the formalizing of a program of education in this field of employment counseling. Five building blocks of employment counseling include the following: (1) communication skills--the ability to present appropriate written and oral information; (2) interpersonal skills--the ability to establish and develop mutually trusting and respectful relationships; (3) influencing skills--building on the interpersonal skills, the ability to have an effect on clients' behaviors through direct intervention; (4) information management skills--the efficient, accurate organization of data; and (5) analytic skills--the skill to understand clients' employment/career lifestyle and personality from a cognitive perspective. (The specific course requirements for the program in employment counseling at Sandford Fleming College, Peterborough, Ontario, are included, arranged by fundamental skills with number of program hours. The academic curriculum by semester is outlined in a chart.) (ABL)

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The Application of the Knowledge Base and Skills of Employment Counselling and Canada's First Employment Counselling Program - Year Two

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This article will describe the skills, understanding and information of the new and developing field of Employment Counselling. This knowledge base will be described as it is reflected in the Employment Counsellor program of study available at Sir Sandford Fleming College and developed by the author, Bill O'Byrne.

The article will begin with background behind the realization of the need for specialized education in the field. It will continue with a description of the "generic" skills which are fundamental to the program entrant, and which are developed continuously through to graduation and later in the work force. This will be followed by an examination of how these fundamental skills are translated into the courses of the academic curriculum.

I. BACKGROUND TO EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING STUDY REALIZATION

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Commonly, those who entered the field of Employment Counselling indicated interest in "helping people", and human Psychology. Their educational background might be a University Bachelor of Arts or Graduate Degree in a Social Science, a College Social Service Diploma, or occasionally a High School Graduation Diploma with above average communication, and interpersonal skills.

Once working in the field, most of the specialized learning about the field occured on the job. Training in the field on the job may extend up to two years and beyond. During this period, the staff Employment Counsellor will be carrying a regular case load but be more client effective after more time with the agency. Initially, issues such as interview and resume presentation strategies, career theories, and testing were likely understood at an above average "lay" level rather than the more expert level acquired over several years. Consequently, this has led to a demand for better trained entrant practitioners in the field. This was a further impetus behind the formalizing of a program of education in this field.

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Additional reasons for such need were found in concerns evident in both the private and public sectors. In regard to the private sector, our global village was living the impact of the explosion of technology. In Canada, in fact throughout the western world, due to world wide competition, (and in Canada the reality of Free Trade) industries were shrinking ("downsizing") and many were closing. Assuming there were alternative employment opportunities, were there enough quality trained people available to give constructive, competent, reasonably priced assistance to reformulate new employment and career goals?

Further, in this private sector, another reality involved the private employment agencies. Generally, these companies would develop expertise in a sector of the employment market. Their staff would be hired if they had excellent communcations skills, were assertive, (some would say aggressive), could achieve regular sales targets, and had the sufficient personal and academic background established by the organization. There seemed to be a need to assist in staff's education and training before working for these agencies.

In regard to the public sector, in Canada and the Western world, the early nineteen eighties led to enhanced public awareness that, with regard to employment, youth were the special victims of macro economic forces. Generally, the unemployment rate for youth (ages 15-24) is about double that of the non youth (ages 25-64) population. Some long term action needed to be taken. In Ontario, Youth Employment Counselling Centres were opened and FUTURES offices were established. They were viewed as a resource to balance the employment disadvantages of youth through constructive, informed job search assistance and employer wage subsidy. Since the early 1980's, in Ontario, a total of about 90 OYECC and FUTURES offices have come into existence. These organizations employ hundreds of Employment Counsellors.

Along with this awareness that special assistance to aid young people to find and keep jobs was necessary, came the parallel realization that minority and disadvantaged groups could benefit from similar programs. Consequently, many Social Service agencies began looking for and some hired new staff who were effectively Employment Counsellors. Some schools introduced or added to their staff of Placement Officers and Cooperative Education Staff - another location of employment for the skills of an Employment Counsellor.

Finally, as indicated earlier, most training backgrounds for these specialists are found in the Social Science disciplines. Their study is deficient in one area - Business Studies. How does the micro and macro-economy influence employment? What are the requirements to understand and apply financial management skills in the operation of an Employment service agency? Most often, the best Employment Counsellor received promotion to management, then, on the job, learned how to manage, build, maintain, and control budgets.

For all of the above reasons, the decision to proceed to build and offer a program in Employment Counselling made great sense. There was a clear need to bring together the special knowledge of this field and increase the numbers of qualified personnel in the field. Consequently, this need was transformed gradually from an idea into this new program offering entitled Employment Counselling beginning in 1987.

II. FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS OF EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING

Through working, teaching and learning in the field, the basic elements of employment counselling work are better able to be identified.

What are these fundamental or "generic" skills that incoming and graduating students possess and that the latter have to a much expanded and in depth degree?

Five fundamental or "generic"skills, which are the building blocks of employment counselling, are identifiable. They are **Communication skills, Interpersonal skills, Influencing skills, Information Management skills, and Analytic skills.**

What do we mean by these skills? Some brief definitions follow.

Communications Skills - the ability to present appropriate written and oral information.

Interpersonal Skills - the ability to establish and develop mutually trusting and respectful professional relationships.

Influencing Skills - building on the interpersonal skills, the ability to have an effect on clients behaviours through direct intervention.

Information Management Skills - the efficient, accurate organization of data.

Analytic Skills - the skill to understand clients employment/career lifestyle and personality from a cognitive perspective.

Although, in many respects, the communication skills underpin all learning and work experience, generally, one of the aforementioned skills are practiced to a greater degree in each of the subjects. The following list identifies all the courses in the program according to which of the five fundamental skills are most prominent along with their total number of academic hours of instruction in that subject.

Program Listing According to Fundamental Skill

	FUNDAMENTAL SKILL		Program Hrs.
1.	Communications - (3 courses)		160
2.	Interpersonal -	Counselling Methods and Practicum	32
		Field Experience (4 experiences)	500
		Field Integration	48
		Group Work and the Job Club	16
		Total hrs. (approximate)	596
3.	Intervention -	Counselling Methods and Practicum	32
		Field Practice (4 experiences)	300
		Group Work and the Job Club	16
		Total hrs. (approximate)	348
4.	Information Management		
		Introduction to Microcomputer Applications	48
		(Statistics II) and Computer Applications	18
		Employment Counselling II (resources in field and evaluation of them)	48
		Total hrs. (approximate)	114

5.	Analytic	-	Psychology (over three semesters) -	144
			Introduction to Community Structures	60
			Human Growth and Development	48
			Career Considerations in Community Services	48
			Lifestyle/Weliness	48
			Sociology of Work	48
			Employment Counselling I (the Job Search)	48
			Mathematics (preparation for business and statistical applications)	48
			Abnormal Psychology	48
			Organizational Financial Management	48
			Skills Assesment	48
			Statistics I	48
			Counselling, Ethics and the Law	48
			Statistics II and (Computer Applications)	30
			Special Groups	48
			Employment Counselling III (Job Keeping and Career Development)	48
			Career Theories	48
			Measurement and Research	48
			Group Work and the Job Club	16
			The Economy and Work	48
			Entrepreneurship	48
			Total hrs. (approximate)	1118

Total Program hours 2338*

Three points require emphasis as to the skills acquisition of the Employment Counselling knowledge base through the academic process.

a) In general, all students entering the program have these "generic" skills to some degree. These skills are enhanced and deepened significantly through the academic and field experiences that occur over the three years.

b) In a number of programs there is more than one fundamental skill acquired through the course. In a few instances, the author estimated the number of hours that were applied to the acquisition of each of two significant "generic" skills in the course.

c) With all courses, skill acquisition and demonstration is evaluated through and by means of primarily written and oral practises.

III. ACADEMIC CURRICULUM BY SEMESTER

The academic curriculum by semester Is outlined in the chart below.

III. COURSES

SEMESTER I

	HR./WK
COMMUNICATIONS	4
INRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY I	3
INTRO COMMUNITY STRUCTURES	5
HUMAN GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT	3
LIFESTYLE/WELLNESS	3
INTRO TO MICROCOMPUTER	3
CAREER CONSIDERATIONS	3
TOTAL	24

SEMESTER II

	HR./WK
COMMUNICATIONS	3
PSYCHOLOGY II	3
SOCIOLOGY OF WORK	3
ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY	3
MATHEMATICS	3
COUNSELLING METHODS AND FIELD PREPARATION	5
EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING I	3
TOTAL	23

SEMESTER III

COMMUNICATIONS	3
COUNSELLING, ETHICS & THE LAW	2
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	3
STATISTICS I	3
FIELD PRACTICE (Two days/wk)	10*
FIELD INTEGRATION	2
TOTAL	23

SEMESTER IV

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR	3
STATISTICS II & COMPUTER APPLICATIONS	3
SKILLS ASSESSMENT	3
SPECIAL GROUPS	3
EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING II	3
FIELD PRACTICE (two days/wk)	10*
FIELD INTEGRATION	1
TOTAL	26

* Field Practice time is indicated by means of academic hours. Actually, the student will spend approximately 50% more chronological hours.

SEMESTER V		SEMESTER VI	
CAREER THEORIES	3	FULL SEMESTER FIELD PRACTICE	25*
MEASUREMENT & RESEARCH	5	(five days a week entire semester)	
GROUP WORK AND THE JOB CLUB	2		
THE ECONOMY & WORK	3		
ENTREPRENEURSHIP	2		
EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING III	3		
EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE (1 day)	5*		
TOTAL	23	TOTAL	25

The program's objective is to graduate individuals with the proper mix of human service and business skills to permit them to work successfully in Employment Counselling. With respect to the business component, understandings concerning organizational financial management and contemporary business trends, as they effect employment opportunities, are acquired.

Entry to the program is by means of two criteria - Grade 12 graduation dipoma (Ontario Secondary School Graduation including Grade 12 general level Mathematics) or equivalent and written responses to a questionnaire with regards to their application to the program.

IV. SUMMARY

This article has explained the five fundamental or "generic" skills which are developed in order to be successful in the new career field of Employment Counselling. In addition, the program of study offered by Sir Sandford Fleming College, Peterborough, Ontario was examined as how these "generic" or fundamental skills are realized in the curriculum.

REFERENCES

1. Intentional Interviewing and Counselling: Facilitating Client Development Allen E. Ivey, 1988, 2nd edition. Brooks Cole Publishing Company, (Distributed in Canda by Wadsworth, Inc.,) Pacific Grove, California, USA, 93950.
Ivey's microskills hirarchy explains in more detail the specifics elements of the Interpersonal Skills (ie. attending behaviour, basic listening sequence etc.) and the Influencing Skills (i.e., directives, logical consequences, self disclosure, feedback, interpretation etc.)